

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

An apparatus and method for molding a component onto a stretched blank. The apparatus includes a stretching assembly mounted adjacent to a first mold part. The stretching assembly includes a plurality of clamp assemblies that grasp the peripheral edge of the blank and a plurality of slide assemblies that move the clamp assemblies away from one another to apply a stretch to the fabric. The apparatus further includes a press for closing a second mold part onto the first mold part while the fabric is held in a stretched condition by the stretching assembly. In one embodiment, the stretching assembly may include a float plate that is movable with respect to the first mold part between a stretch position and a mold position. The apparatus may include a robot with tooling for moving the fabric onto the stretching assembly. The tooling may include a plurality of shot pins that push the fabric off of the tooling onto corresponding fabric pins in the stretching machine. In one embodiment, the apparatus include a stretch measuring device adapted to measure the stretch applied to the fabric.

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